

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 8492

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV CG PINT

SUBJECT: ZAIRE'S ELECTIONS-FIRST STEP TAKEN

REF: KIN 7427 AND PREVIOUS

1. SUMMARY: REGISTRATION OF CANDIDATES FOR THE OCTOBER ELECTIONS ENDED AUGUST 31. WHILE FIGURES ARE NOT YET COMPLETE, A LARGE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS HAVE REGISTERED AS CANDIDATES FOR THE POLITBUREAU AND THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL. THE SITUATION CONCERNING CANDIDATES FOR THE BOROUGH COUNCILS IS LESS CLEAR. IN SOME REGIONS ENOUGH CANDIDATES PRESENTED THEMSELVES TO ALLOW THE POSSIBILITY OF A REAL CHOICE, WHILE IN OTHERS THERE ARE ONLY ONE OR AT MOST TWO CANDIDATES FOR EACH POSITION. IT IS TOO EARLY TO MAKE ANY JUDGMENT ABOUT THE ZAIRIAN ELECTIONS AS A GENUINE EXERCISE IN DEMOCRACY, BUT THE INITIAL STAGES ARE AT LEAST MILDLY ENCOURAGING. END SUMMARY.

2. ON JULY 1 PRESIDENT MOBUTU ANNOUNCED THAT ELECTIONS WOULD TAKE PLACE: OCT. 8-9 FOR THE BOROUGH COUNCILS ("CONSEILS DES ZONES URBAINES" I.E., THE GOVERNING BODIES OF THE DISTRICTS INTO WHICH THE CITIES AND TOWNS ARE DIVIDED); OCT. 15-16 FOR THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL; AND OCT. 22-23 FOR THE MPR POLITICAL BUREAU. AT A
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CONGRESS IN LATE NOVEMBER THE MPR WILL CHOOSE ITS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE.

3. FIGURES ON THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CANDIDATES THAT HAVE REGISTERED HAVE TRICKLED IN FROM 5 OF ZAIRE'S 9 REGIONS. A GOOD NUMBER OF CANDIDATES ARE RUNNING FOR THE POLITBUREAU: AN AVERAGE OF 10 CANDIDATES FOR EACH SEAT AVAILABLE. CANDIDATES FOR ELECTION TO THE

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ARE ALSO NUMEROUS: AN AVERAGE OF BETWEEN 6 AND 7 CANDIDATES FOR EACH POSITION. THE SITUATION CONCERNING THE BOROUGH COUNCILS IS MORE MIXED. FOR EXAMPLE, IN KINSHASA, 929 CANDIDATES FILED FOR 362 SEATS. IN EQUATEUR, ON THE OTHER HAND, ONLY 110 CANDIDATES PRESENTED THEMSELVES FOR 78 SEATS. IN SHORT, AFTER AN INITIAL PERIOD OF HESITATION, WHEN CANDIDATES WERE SO FEW THAT THE REGISTRATION PERIOD HAD TO BE EXTENDED, REGISTRATION RESULTED IN A LARGE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES EXCEPT AT THE BOROUGH LEVEL WHERE RESULTS WERE SPOTTY.

4. THUS FAR, WE HAVE ONLY A HANDFUL OF NAMES OF THE CANDIDATES. LACKING SUCH INFORMATION, WE ARE UNABLE TO DETERMINE WHETHER MOST OR ALL CANDIDATES ARE FERVENT SUPPORTERS OF THE REGIME OR WHETHER A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF REAL INDEPENDENTS ARE INCLUDED. IT IS CLEAR THAT SOME CANDIDATES WERE SPECIFICALLY SELECTED BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. FOR EXAMPLE, CONSULATE LUBUMBASHI TELLS US THAT THE SON OF LUBA CHIEF KABONGO KANIEMA WAS REPORTEDLY TOLD BY THE LOCAL CND THAT HE WOULD BE A CANDIDATE. SIMILAR REPORTS CONCERNING THE CND ALLEGEDLY ORDERING CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS TO RUN ARE CIRCULATING HERE IN KINSHASA.

5. THERE IS NO DOUBT AS TO MOBUTU'S GENUINE DESIRE TO HOLD THE ELECTIONS ALTHOUGH WE DOUBT THAT HE WOULD ALLOW THEM TO CAUSE ANY MAJOR SHIFTS OF POWER OF WHICH HE DISAPPROVES. THE PRESIDENT HAS REPORTEDLY TAKEN A PERSONAL HAND IN THE FORMULATION OF THE REGULATIONS, THE TIMING OF THE ELECTIONS, AND THE DEADLINES LEAD-
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ING UP TO THEM. MOBUTU HAS CONSISTENTLY MADE PLAIN THROUGH HIS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WORDS AND ACTIONS THAT HE WISHES HIS "MOVE TO DEMOCRACY" TO SERVE AS AN ANSWER TO THOSE WHO CRITICIZE HIM FOR LEADING AN AUTOCRATIC REGIME. A MAJOR PURPOSE OF FALLEN FONMIN NGUZA'S TRIP TO WASHINGTON WAS TO UNDERSCORE THIS VERY POINT. MOREOVER, MOBUTU HAS USED EUROPEAN MEDIA TO DEVELOP THE IMPRESSION OF A TRUE ELECTION WHICH SHALL LEAD TO AN IMPROVED POLITICAL CLIMATE IN ZAIRE.

6. IT IS ALSO SIGNIFICANT THAT A RECENT CONFERENCE OF REGIONAL COMMISSIONERS (GOVERNORS) TO COORDINATE THE NATIONAL STRATEGY AND REGULATIONS OF THE ELECTIONS FOR ALL THE REGIONS, WAS HELD IN MOBUTU'S NATAL VILLAGE OF GBADOLITE; THEREBY UNDERSCORING MOBUTU'S PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. SUCH A COMMITMENT CAN BE EXPECTED TO CHANNEL ALL THE ORGANS OF THE STATE INTO A PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION OF SUPPORT FOR THE ELECTIONS.

7. COMMENT: IN ZAIRE, GOVERNMENT PRONOUNCEMENTS CONCERNING A RETURN TO DEMOCRACY TEND TO BE GREETED BY SKEPTICISM OR BY OUTRIGHT HOSTILITY ON THE PART OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS OF THE CURRENT RULING ELITE. CERTAINLY THIS HAS BEEN THE CASE INsofar AS THE OCTOBER ELECTIONS ARE CONCERNED. NOT ONLY IS IT

ALLEGED THAT THE GOVERNMENT FORCED CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS TO PUT THEIR NAMES FORWARD BUT ALSO WENT SO FAR AS TO SUPPLY THE NECESSARY FUNDS FOR THEM TO DO SO. OTHER ALLEGATIONS INCLUDE GOVERNMENTAL WARNINGS TO CERTAIN POTENTIAL CANDIDATES THAT THEY WOULD BE WELL ADVISED NOT TO PUT THEIR NAMES FORTH AND RUMORS THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS ALREADY DECIDED WHICH CANDIDATES WILL WIN WHICH SEATS.

8. IT IS CERTAINLY FAR TOO EARLY TO SUBSCRIBE TO SUCH PESSIMISM. THE GOVERNMENTAL MEDIA HAVE GONE ALL OUT ATTEMPTING TO WHIP UP INTEREST IN THE ELECTIONS. THE LARGE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES FOR THE POLITBUREAU AND LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL WOULD SEEM TO INDICATE THAT THIS CAMPAIGN HAS HAD SOME SUCCESS AT LEAST AMONG THE ELITE. POPULAR ENTHUSIASM, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS MORE QUESTIONABLE. RECENT WARNINGS TO CANDIDATES AGAINST LEVYING PERSONAL ATTACKS
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AGAINST ONE'S OPPONENTS AND OTHER CALLS FOR DISCIPLINE, PROBABLY EVIDENCE GOVERNMENTAL CONCERN THAT THE ELECTIONS NOT GET OUT OF HAND.

9. IN SHORT, THE EMBASSY'S ANALYSIS OF THE INITIAL STAGES OF THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IS CAUTIOUSLY POSITIVE. THE VOTER REGISTRATION AND CAMPAIGNING PERIOD WHICH IS NOW UNDERWAY SHOULD PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INDICATIONS OF HOW DEMOCRATIC THAT PROCESS WILL ACTUALLY BE.
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